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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 11 TOKYO 002112

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 08/01/08

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3) Prime Minister's schedule, July 31

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
August 1, 2008

10:08

Met at the Kantei with Administrative Reform Minister Watanabe and Public Servant System Reform Taskforce Head Tachibana. Followed by Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director General Saiki.

12:07

Arrived at his official residence.

12:48

Attended the funeral for former Upper House member Hiroshi Inoue at the funeral hall on the Aoyama grave site.

14:07

Arrived at his official residence.

16:20

Met Cabinet Office's Special Advisor Kurokawa at the Kantei.

16:58

Met Agriculture Minister Wakabayashi, METI Minister Amari, Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura, Agriculture Deputy Vice Minister Murakami, METI Trade and Commerce Policy Bureau Director General Ishige, and Foreign Ministry's Economic Affairs Bureau Director General Otabe.

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18:30

Arrived at his official residence.

19:34

Dined with his secretaries at a Chinese restaurant in the Grand Prince Hotel Akasaka.

21:08

Met Machimura at the official residence.

23:14

Met Secretary General Ibuki.

4) Premier to sound out Aso for LDP secretary general post in shuffling his cabinet today: Likely to retain Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura

ASAHI (Top Play) (Full)
August 1, 2008

Prime Minister Fukuda has firmed up his intent to shuffle the cabinet and reshuffle the leadership of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) on August 1. He will make a final confirmation after a meeting today with New Komeito head Ota at his office. Fukuda wants to replace Secretary General Bunmei Ibuki with Taro Aso, who previously served in the post. He yesterday sounded out Aso about assuming that post on the phone. Today, he will meet him face to face and ask him to accept his offer. Aso is considering the offer with the possibility of accepting it, if conditions are met. Machimura, the chief cabinet secretary, the key post in the cabinet, will likely stay on.

This will be the first cabinet shuffle since the Fukuda administration was launched in September 2007. Some 15 of 17 incumbent ministers of his cabinet were either reappointed to the same posts or different posts from the previous Abe cabinet. All eyes are fixed on the prime minister to see if he can form his own cabinet and prepare the way for a dissolution of the Lower House for a snap election, taking the initiative.

Land, Infrastructure and Transport Minister Fuyushiba from the New Komeito will likely be replaced. Amid concern about an economic recession, the selection of economic ministers is also drawing attention. Chances are that the cabinet shuffle will be minor if Fukuda fails to persuade Aso to assume that post.

With a Lower House dissolution strategy in mind, Fukuda will give top priority to the selection of the secretary general, who will be tasked with leading the election campaign, in reshuffling the LDP leadership. He wants to replace Ibuki with Aso, who is popular with the public. Persons such as Finance Minister Nukaga have been floated as candidates in the event Aso turns down the offer. Ibuki has been at odds with the New Komeito over the timing of convening an extraordinary Diet session. As such, it has been pointed out that if he stays on, the LDP's relations with the New Komeito would be

strained. A plan has been floated to appoint him to a key cabinet post.

Concerning a cabinet shuffle, the prime minister on the evening of July 31 told reporters after meeting Agriculture Minister Wakabayashi and Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Amari, who have

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returned home from multilateral trade talks sponsored by the World Trade Organization (WTO), "I have that in mind. We as heads of the ruling parties will reach a decision at a meeting tomorrow."

Referring to the planned meeting with Ota, Fukuda said, "I would like to confer on various matters with him, including a future political schedule. I want to discuss with him how to address future policy themes and what system we will make." He thus indicated his intention to coordinate views with Ota on when to convene the extraordinary Diet session, an issue over which both parties are at odds, and the issue of extending the law governing the MSDF refueling operation in the Indian Ocean, on which some New Komeito members are taking a cautious stance.

The prime minister will first deal with reshuffling the LDP leadership after the party head meeting with the New Komeito. He will select new party executives this afternoon. He will then receive letters of resignation from all cabinet ministers at a special cabinet meeting and set up a cabinet formation headquarters at the Kantei this evening. An attestation ceremony at the Imperial Palace for new ministers will likely take place tomorrow.

5) New Komeito distances itself from government, criticizing LDP and calling for caution on using override vote

ASAHI (Page 4) (Excerpts)
August 1, 2008

The distance between New Komeito and the Fukuda administration is rapidly growing. The New Komeito has thrust one demand after another at the government regarding the timing for a dissolution of the House of Representatives, Diet management, and policies. New Komeito President Ota is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Fukuda today amid a growing sense of alarm in his party over the next Lower House election.

Ota to meet Fukuda today

Senior New Komeito members began to voice criticism of the government around when Fukuda entered his summer vacation and started looking into a cabinet shuffle.

In a meeting of senior members of the Liberal Democratic Party and the New Komeito on July 17, Secretary General Kazuo Kitagawa proposed opening an extraordinary Diet session in late September, raising an objection to the plan of the government and the ruling camp to convene the session in late August. Following Kitagawa's remark, one New Komeito member after another presented views critical of the prime minister and the Liberal Democratic Party. Election Committee Chairman Yosuke Takagi said: "Unless the LDP changes itself, the party will be ruined." Policy Research Council Deputy Chairman Natsuo Yamaguchi commented: "It would be better to avoid a Lower House dissolution under pressure."

When the senior leaders of the two parties met again on the 30th, LDP Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Tadamori Oshima cautioned the participants: "I want you to refrain from making comments publicly on a Lower House dissolution, because such remarks will limit the prime minister's supreme authority."

The remarks critical of the LDP reflect growing dissatisfaction with the LDP in Soka Gakkai, the power base of the New Komeito. Soka

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Gakkai has been increasingly irritated with the LDP since the ruling camp suffered a crushing defeat in the House of Councillors election

last year. A senior member of the religious group claimed: "The LDP has little sense of alarm." Group members interpret the remarks by senior New Komeito members as fully reflecting their feelings. In late July, a senior group member reportedly told senior LDP Election Committee members about the atmosphere in the Soka Gakkai.

6) Prime Minister Fukuda's decision to shuffle cabinet creating commotion in LDP; Party leaders misread timing

MAINICHI (Page 3) (Full)
August 1, 2008

The report that the cabinet will be shuffled this week is creating a stir in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in which speculation was rife that a cabinet shuffle would occur next week. One LDP lawmaker had to suddenly cancel his planned seminar in his home constituency. General Council Deputy Chairman Kyogon Hagiya told General Council Chairman Toshiro Nikai last evening at LDP headquarters: "Since the nation and party are more important (for me than a meeting), I will not go (to my hometown) to give a speech." Hagiya had planned to give a speech at a meeting on the evening of August 1 in the city of Himi, Toyama Prefecture, which had invited him. He cancelled his plan after receiving information about the cabinet shuffle. Hagiya, a member of the Ibuki faction, is regarded as a possible candidate to join the new cabinet. A senior party official said: "He may be eager for a cabinet post."

The LDP leadership, too, has misjudged the outlook. Policy Research Council Chairman Sadakazu Tanigaki in a speech last evening said with a forced smile: "Secretary General Bunmei Ibuki and I planned to give speeches at a seminar hosted by Mr. Ibuki tomorrow in Kyoto."

Although the seminar will be held this morning in the city of Kyoto, Ibuki will not attend it because he will have to join a meeting between Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and New Komeito leader Akihiro Ota that will take place this morning. He suddenly recorded his speech on a DVD and it will be shown in the seminar. Tanigaki will attend the seminar for 25 minutes by reducing the planned 90 minutes and he will return to Tokyo.

Ibuki was in Kyoto last night to attend a meeting, but he went back to Tokyo after staying there for only one hour.

One party executive member said displeasingly: "I wonder if the Prime Minister makes all decisions by himself. No information was leaked. I wonder why the Prime Minister does this thing, even to the party leadership."

7) Will cabinet shuffle boost Fukuda administration's popularity?

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
August 1, 2009

The cabinet shuffles carried out in recent years have not necessarily led to gaining public support.

According to the results of nationwide (interview-based) polls the Yomiuri Shimbun conducted before and after the last 12 cabinet shuffles, the support rate increased in seven shuffles and decreased

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in five ones. Of the 12 shuffles, just a small change -- a drip or surge of only two percentage points -- was seen in eight shuffles.

The major successful example is the shuffle of the cabinet of Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi in January 1999. The Obuchi government's approval rate jumped 11 percentage points because of public expectations of the coalition government of the Liberal Democratic Party and Jiyuto (Liberal Party), although only one new minister was named.

In addition, the first shuffle of the cabinet of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in September 2003 was a successful example, gaining seven percentage points in the support rate. Koizumi changed nine of the 17 ministers and carried out some "surprise

appointments," naming Yuriko Koike as environment minister and Shinzo Abe as secretary general of the LDP.

On the other hand, there were the cases of failure. In the reshuffle of the second cabinet of Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, 17 of the 20 ministers were replaced. Since the appointment of Takayuki Sato, who had been convicted on charges of being involved in the Lockheed scandal, was severely criticized by the public, Sato resigned as a minister after serving in his cabinet post only 12 days. As a result, the Hashimoto cabinet's approval rating plunged 12 percentage points.

8) Calls for determining DPJ leader without a vote growing; Focus, too, on Edano, Noda

ASAHI (Page 4) (Excerpts)
August 1, 2008

With the Democratic Party of Japan presidential race coming up in September, the growing mood in the party is to reelect President Ichiro Ozawa for a third term without a formal vote. Amid a rumor that the Lower House might be dissolved before the end of the year, Vice President Katsuya Okada, who was regarded as a promising candidate, has indicated that he would not run in the race. Calls for policy debate in the leadership race are likely to be deafened by the roaring wind of dissolution that has begun to blow.

In a press conference on July 30, Okada said: "At present, I do not have a strong desire to run in the leadership race. One individual should serve as party president until the next general election. It is not desirable to carry out a presidential election at a time like this when the next general election seems near at hand." As a result, the view that Okada will not run in the race has spread in the party.

Consideration then was given in the party for former Policy Research Committee Chairperson Yukio Edano of the Ryounkai group, which includes Vice President Seiji Maehara and Yoshito Sengoku, to become a candidate. Public Relations Committee Chair Yoshihiko Noda, who heads the Kaseikai group, also hinted at being a candidate, saying, "A presidential election will be carried out without fail." Although moves by Edano and Noda are the center of attention for the time being, the future course of the presidential race, including the gathering recommendations, remains murky.

At the same time, there are growing calls for selecting the leader without a vote. Former Secretary General Tatsuo Kawabata, who is leading the former Democratic Socialist Party group, at his

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fund-raising party on July 29, put pressure on the group to favor such a course: "People should grow out of the argument that an election should be held in order to demonstrate that the Democratic Party of Japan is an open party. Those who are looking for someone must be confusing the means for the objective."

Deputy President Naoto Kan, who is close to Edano, also said in his workshop on July 30: "Putting aside likes or dislikes, I think at this political conjuncture, we need a leader who is feared by the Liberal Democratic Party. I believe fighting the next general election under President Ozawa will maximize the chances of a change of government." Kan also made this comment about Edano in a press conference on July 31: "He has what it takes to be a leader. Generally speaking, it is good for a variety of people to come forward, but my judgment will not change."

9) DPJ to intensify offensive in extra Diet session and force Fukuda to dissolve Lower House

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
August 1, 2009

Following Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's decision to shuffle his cabinet, the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) will intensify its political offensive in the next extraordinary Diet session in order to force Fukuda to dissolve the House of

Representatives and hold a snap election. Since discord is evident between the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its junior coalition partner New Komeito, the largest opposition party has judged that the Lower House will be dissolved earlier than expected. It intends to attend deliberations in the extra session in order to gill the new Fukuda cabinet over such issues as the controversial health insurance system for people aged 75 and older, as well as reform of the system of using dedicated revenue sources for road projects.

DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa said at a press meeting yesterday in Saitama City: "What the public hopes is not just changing the cabinet lineup but a change of government."

At the final stage of the recent regular Diet session, the DPJ submitted to the House of Councillors a censure motion against Fukuda, but Fukuda ignored it. Reacting strongly against it, the DPJ boycotted all deliberations. However, it has now changed its tactic, thinking that pursuing the new Fukuda cabinet in debate would be more effective to undermine it.

In the upcoming extra Diet session, the DPJ plans to call for an early abolition of the health insurance system for the elderly. It will present a bill abolishing the provisional tax rates, including gasoline-related taxes. Regarding a bill extending the special measures law on Japan's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean, about which the New Komeito has been cautious, Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Kenji Yamaoka said: "If they try to take an overriding vote, we will boycott deliberations."

10) DPJ's Public Offices Election Law amendment plan designed to ban Diet seat hereditary practice and allow use of Internet in campaigning

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Abridged)
August 1, 2008

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The Democratic Party of Japan's task force to promote political reform is scheduled to produce an interim report in August on reviewing the Public Offices Election Law. The report is mainly designed to prohibit the hereditary transfer of Diet seats and allow the use of the Internet in election campaigning. The DPJ plans to call the ruling bloc for talks on amending the Public Offices Election Law in the next extraordinary Diet session.

The report shows eight policies, including greater freedom, more consideration to the aged and the handicapped, and less costly campaigning. Based on these policies, the report includes: (1) the lifting of the ban on the use of the Internet in campaigning and on door-to-door canvassing by candidates, (2) preventing the children of former Diet members from running in the same constituencies, (3) prohibiting lawmakers from sending congratulatory or condolence telegrams to voters in their constituencies, and (4) prohibiting local heads from serving multiple terms.

At the same time, some believe that prohibiting the hereditary practice should be made into a party rule rather than legislation from the viewpoint of freedom of employment. Some also think the step is unconvincing in view of the fact that both President Ichiro Ozawa and Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama are from prominent political families.

11) Japan to wait and see on Takeshima issue

SANKEI (Page 1) (Abridged)
August 1, 2008

Takashi Arimoto

WASHINGTON-The Board on Geographic Names (BGN), a U.S. government organization, has now restored its description of Takeshima (Dokdo in Korean), a pair of rocky islets in the Sea of Japan, from "undesignated sovereignty" to "South Korean territory." The White House, faced with strong reactions from the South Korean government,

ordered the BGN to do so. The U.S. government takes the position that it does not acknowledge South Korea's territorial right to the disputed group of islets and remains committed to its neutral stance. However, a source familiar with Japan-U.S. relations revealed that the Japanese government had not been informed that the U.S. would regard the islets as South Korean territory again.

"I regret that the change of description made South Koreans think that our policy has changed," U.S. National Security Council (NSC) Senior Director for Asian Affairs Wilder said yesterday.

The BGN's change in its description of the islets to "undesignated sovereignty" was originally intended to make the U.S. government's neutral stance clearer. According to Wilder, however, there was a request to President Bush from a "very high level" official of the South Korean government. Bush told Secretary of State Rice to reconsider the matter and decided to restore the original status of the islets, judging that there was no good reason to change it at this point, Wilder said.

Bush is scheduled to visit South Korea from Aug. 8. Given this, the decision can be taken as a measure giving first consideration to the success of his meeting with the South Korean leader. However, there is also a backlash against a U.S. government stance that can be

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taken as "Japan passing" or making light of Japan.

12) Japan to take wait-and-see attitude over Takeshima description

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)
August 1, 2008

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) has now restored its description of Takeshima, a pair of rocky islets in the Sea of Japan, from the previous "undesignated sovereignty" to "South Korea." On this issue, the Japanese government is underscoring its calm response. The Japanese government, while maintaining that Takeshima is Japan's inherent territory, will neither call on the United States to change its description nor file a protest, which would cause Japan's relations with South Korea to deteriorate further.

The Japanese government presumes that the U.S. government had intended to prepare a better atmosphere ahead of U.S. President Bush's scheduled visit to South Korea on Aug. 5. It also considered that Japan and South Korea are currently at odds over the description of Takeshima in an education ministry manual explaining new middle school curriculum guidelines for social studies.

However, the Japanese government is not planning to just take a wait-and-see attitude; it is also considering working informally on the U.S. government to restore "undesignated sovereignty." After President Bush's visit to South Korea, the Japanese government will explain to the U.S. government that the United States had previously acknowledged Takeshima as part of Japan's territory, according to a government source. "We want the United States to understand this fact," the source said.

13) Government perplexed at South Korea's reaction to Takeshima issue, with no signs of improvement in relations, but intends to take wait-and-see attitude

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
August 1, 2008

Over a U.S. government organization's reversion of its description about the sovereignty of the disputed Takeshima islets (called Dokdo in South Korea) from "non-designated sovereignty" to "South Korea," the Japanese government intends to take a wait-and-see attitude for a while. In the Foreign Ministry, however, many officials are perplexed at South Korea's unabated ire over the Takeshima issue.

The dominant view in the government is that the U.S. government agency's reversion of its description of the islets will have little impact on the Takeshima dispute itself, based on the view that

Washington's neutral stance remains unchanged.

Seeing the government's uncommitted stance, some might think that the government has given its tacit approval, but the government's judgment is that an overreaction could result in exacerbating resentment toward Japan among South Koreans.

Even so, the government is concerned about South Korea's unrelenting strong reaction to the Takeshima issue.

The Japanese government has made efforts to improve relations with South Korea, based on the judgment that it would be wiser to build a

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new age of future-oriented Japan-South Korea relations, instead of underscoring the rift between the two countries over the Takeshima and school textbook disputes. In dealing with North Korea, as well, cooperation and understanding from South Korea are indispensable for Japan, which is saddled with the issue of abducted Japanese nationals.

Affected by the Takeshima issue, however, the Japanese and South Korean foreign ministers just stood and talked, though they had a chance for bilateral talks on the sidelines of the unofficial six-party foreign ministerial on the North Korean nuclear issue. Visible effects have also begun to appear, such as the cancellation of planned exchanges of private-sector personnel and other events.

The government expects the situation to calm down quickly, as a senior Foreign Ministry official said: "Setting aside both sides' different positions, it is important for the two countries to cooperate on matters on which they have common consensus. There are many things for Japan and South Korea to tackle in cooperation." But the government remains unable to find a way to improve the strained relations with South Korea.

14) U.S. nuclear-powered carrier to be deployed to Yokosuka in September; Cause of fire was smoking

AKAHATA (Page 1) (Excerpt)
August 1, 2008

The U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet has carried out an investigation of the cause of disastrous fire on the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier George Washington in late May and concluded on July 30 that "unauthorized smoking" started the fire. The vessel's commanding officer Capt. Dykhoff and the executive officer Capt. Dober both resigned. The announcement stated that the carrier would be deployed to the U.S. Navy base at Yokosuka in late September.

15) Gov't sets up 2 teams to study Futenma relocation with Okinawa

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
August 1, 2008

The government yesterday set up two working-level study teams for discussions with officials from Okinawa Prefecture and its municipalities over the planned relocation of the U.S. military's Futenma airfield in the city of Ginowan in the island prefecture. The Okinawa prefectural government had called on the government to set up the teams. The two teams will hold their first meetings on Aug. 5.

The two study teams are under a currently existing consultative body for central government officials and Okinawa's prefectural and municipal officials over Futenma relocation. One of the two working teams is intended to discuss how to remove danger in the periphery of Futenma airfield, and the other working team is intended to facilitate the planned construction of an alternative base and the implementation of an environmental impact assessment for Futenma relocation.

The two working teams will discuss Futenma relocation, with the Defense Ministry's Local Cooperation Bureau deputy director general presiding. The two teams are made up of officials at the division director level from the Foreign Ministry, Cabinet Secretariat, and

Cabinet Office, and the chief of the Okinawa governor's office and other local officials at the department director general or division director level from the municipal governments of Nago City and Ginoza Village.

In the working teams, Okinawa Prefecture will ask the government to move the planned alternative facility's location offshore. The government takes the position that it would be difficult to change the planned relocation site without a rational reason. However, the government will try to find a way out of the deadlock by considering Okinawa's requests.

16) Average Japanese life span reaches record 85.99 years for women, 79.19 years for men

ASAHI (Page 1) (Abridged)
August 1, 2008

Average life expectancies stood at a record 79.19 years for men and 85.99 years for women in the nation last year, up 0.19 year and 0.18 year, respectively, from the previous year, the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry (MHLW) announced yesterday. The ministry attributes the increased average life spans mainly to improved treatment results for three major diseases: cancer, heart disease and strokes.

According to the latest overseas data held by the MHLW, the longevity of Japanese women was ranked number one in the world for the 23rd straight year, followed by Hong Kong's 85.4 years and France's 84.1 years. Japanese men ranked third following Iceland's 79.4 years and Hong Kong's 79.3 years.

The chance of dying from the three major diseases was 55.57 PERCENT for men and 53.02 PERCENT for women in 2007, down 0.43 points and 0.55 points respectively from the previous year.

SCHIEFFER